CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A fish tape reel assembly disposed about a center axis and lying along first and second sides of a center line intersecting and extending perpendicularly to the center axis, the assembly comprising:

a housing defining a cavity concentric about the center axis and disposed between an outer periphery of the housing and inner periphery of the housing which defines a central opening through which the center axis extends;

a handle member having a retainer shoe captured within the housing so as to be rotatable about the center axis with respect to the housing, the handle member defining an exit aperture on a first side of the center line in communication with the cavity and a pistol grip on a second side of the center line, the pistol grip being oriented so that the weight of the reel assembly is balanced such that a user grasping the pistol grip will have the user's wrist essentially straightened and horizontal in a neutral balanced position of the pistol grip; and

a fish tape wound within the cavity and having one end fixed to the housing and an opposite end extending outside of the housing, wherein the fish tape is wound within the cavity by rotating the housing about the center axis with respect to the handle member.

2. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the pistol grip extends from the second side of the center line at an angle less then ninety degrees from a tangent line intersecting the pistol grip and the housing.

3. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the pistol grip extends at least about three inches to a free end.

4. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the pistol grip defines a convex palm rest and a convex finger grip.

5. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 4, wherein the convex finger and palm rests have raised ribs.

6. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 4, wherein the pistol grip defines a contoured head at a free end for engaging a user's index finger.

7. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the housing defines a circular peripheral groove radially outside of the cavity in which the retainer shoe of the handle member is disposed such that it is isolated from the fish tape other than at the exit aperture.

8. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 7, wherein the retainer shoe is an arcuate band.

9. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 8, wherein the retainer shoe forms a continuous band.

10. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the housing defines a convex outer surface between the inner and outer peripheries.

11. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the housing includes two annular housing parts connected by threaded fasteners.

12. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the inner periphery of the housing defines at least one hand grip adjacent the central opening.

13. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 12, wherein the inner periphery defines three hand grips spaced apart 120 degrees about the center axis.

14. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 13, wherein the hand grips are each convex and at least about three inches in length.

15. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 14, wherein the hand grips have raised ribs.

16. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 13, wherein the inner periphery also defines a hand stop adjacent the hand grip for physical abutment with one's hand during winding.

17. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, wherein the fixed end of the fish tape wraps around an axial pin element within the housing.

18. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 17, wherein the pin element is a threaded fastener joining two annular housing segments defining the cavity.

19. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, in which the fish tape is a flat metal strip.

20. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, further including a hanger at one of the housing and the handle member.

21. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 20, wherein the hanger is intersected by the center line.

22. The fish tape reel assembly of claim 1, further including a winder mechanism having a hub adapted to engage the inner periphery of the housing and having a winder handle adapted to rotate the hub and thereby the housing about the center axis relative to the handle member for winding the fish tape within the cavity.

23. A fish tape apparatus, comprising:

a reel assembly, including:

a housing defining a cavity concentric with a center axis and disposed between an outer periphery of the housing and inner periphery of the housing which defines a central opening through which the center axis extends;

a handle member rotatable about the center axis with respect to the housing and having a pistol grip extending from the housing; and

a fish tape wound within the cavity and having one end fixed to the housing and an opposite end extending through an exit aperture to the outside of the housing; and

a winder mechanism having a hub adapted to engage the inner periphery of the housing and having a handle adapted to rotate the hub and thereby the housing about the center axis relative to the handle member for winding the fish tape within the cavity.

24. The fish tape apparatus of claim 23, wherein the winder mechanism includes a clutch such that rotating the winder handle in one direction rotates the housing with respect to the handle member to wind the fish tape and rotating the winder handle in an opposite direction does not cause the housing to rotate relative to the handle member.

25. The fish tape apparatus of claim 23, wherein the clutch is a drawn cup roller clutch.

26. The fish tape apparatus of claim 23, wherein the winder mechanism is removably mounted at the inner periphery of the reel assembly housing.

27. The fish tape apparatus of claim 23, wherein the hub of the winder mechanism is spaced from a hand grip at the inner periphery of the reel assembly housing.

28. The fish tape apparatus of claim 23, wherein the pistol grip extends to a free end at one side of a center line perpendicular to and intersecting the center axis.

29. A method of assembling a fish tape reel assembly, comprising:

joining a first annular housing part to a second annular housing part with a handle member therebetween having an exit aperture, the first and second housing parts defining a cavity and the handle member including a spacer abutting surfaces of the first and second housing parts to provide a passage in communication with the cavity and the exit aperture;

feeding an anchor end of a fish tape through an exit aperture in the handle member and through the exit aperture and the passage between the first and second housing parts;

attaching the anchor end of the fish tape to a pin element in the housing; and

winding the fish tape within the cavity.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the pin element is a threaded fastener used to join the first and second housing parts.

31. The method of claim 29, wherein the anchor end forms a hook.

32. The method of claim 29, wherein at least one of the first and second housing parts includes a window proximate to the pin element for visual inspection during attachment of the anchor end of the fish tape to the pin element.